

Pastor Tom Mortenson

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Add to Your Faith Perseverance

2 Peter 1:5-7

Prayer: *Father, again, I just thank you for your goodness, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for the gift of your Son. And again I thank you that because of that gift, we can meet, we know that we have a pathway to you that is direct because of what you've done for us on the cross. And so this morning, Lord, we just again thank you for that. We again want to just recognize that without your Holy Spirit's presence here, we're going to be just looking at words that won't make any sense. And so we pray for your Spirit's presence, that you would guide us, walk us into your word, give it the ability to be of permanent value to us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, our text this morning is, again, 2 Peter 1:5-7, which says: *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. This morning we're returning to that cryptic*

phrase that we've been concentrating on, "make every effort to add to your faith," understanding that it means make any effort to let the fullness of the gift of faith play out in the way you're going to live your lives. And we do that by reflecting fully these seven different reflections of what God has given to us through his Spirit. And this morning we're looking at our fourth entry. So far we've looked at goodness, which we've referred to as "the right stuff," it's a combination of passion and courage and energy that puts advancing the kingdom as the most important part of your life. And secondly, a few weeks back, we looked at knowledge and we saw that we are to add knowledge to our faith because, number one, it's God's command; and number two, it's the source of all of our growth; and number three, it's one of the main reasons that we were put on earth for, that we might grow in our knowledge of God. And next we saw self-control really as being Spirit-controlled, not as the products of our wills but, again, as a by-product of abiding in Christ. We saw self-control as a fruit of the Spirit. And we've seen the only way we can possibly grow that fruit is by abiding in Christ.

And so this morning we're going to look at what Peter refers to in this text as perseverance. And once again as we find before, we find again, there's a Greek term here that's not very easy to translate. I looked at four different translations, there's four

different English words for what Peter wrote in the Greek. One says perseverance, another says steadfastness, another says endurance and yet another says patience. And when we look at the Greek, we find that the word for "perseverance" itself is "hupomone" which means literally "to abide under." And what that means is that when bad times come, you abide. That means you stay put, you don't bail, you don't leave, you don't abandon, you abide under bad times and difficulties. It's a super-sized and specialized version of what it means to be patient, and it's not necessarily just the ability to count to ten. I mean in Peter's day it meant abiding under actual physical persecution, the type that we see in China and the Middle East today. For us in the West those trials can range from a car that won't start, to the death of a loved one and anything in between. Peter says that we are to make every effort to add to our faith the ability to patiently endure bad times not just because patience is a virtue but because it's absolutely critical to our faith. And once again, when we speak of patience, we're talking about the fruit of the Spirit. Just to repeat, *Galatians 5* which says: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.* We can only get patience like we can only get any of the other fruits of the Spirit, and that's by abiding in Christ. Knowledge is not one of the fruits of the Spirit, so we can acquire

knowledge by studying. It's something that we can directly go after. Patience is something we cannot because it's a fruit of the Spirit.

And so how do we add patience to our faith? Well, first let's look at what subtracts patience from our Christian experience. Anyone who's been a Christian for any length of time will tell you that you're going to have times when the idea of patience itself gets severely tested. See, God's ways are not our ways and that's never more obvious with regard to patience. One of the greatest mistakes you can make in your Christian life is to lose patience, and one of the easiest ways to lose patience is by assuming that God operates on the same time frame as we do. Let me assure you right now of two things: number one, he doesn't; and number two, he won't. See, a great deal of our disappointment with God has to do with the fact that we don't think he responds fast enough. I can't speak for everybody in the East, but I suspect this is a uniquely Western problem. We in the West operate on a time frame that is not only different from God's but it's vastly different from the rest of the world's. We operate on a lunatic fringe of time where time is literally money and you're wasting my money. I've had the same watch now for about ten or twelve years. I got it from Wal-Mart, cost me ten bucks or so. It's clearly designed for a Western market because my little watch breaks time down to hundredths of

seconds. I mean who besides track runners and swimmers needs time broken down into pieces that tiny? I mean it's exactly the opposite of how Easterners perceive and utilize time. See, Easterners thought in general and the scriptures in particular know no such thing as hundredths of seconds when it comes to time. So the pattern of time that God uses appears to us to be excruciatingly slow when we compare it to our time frame or that time frame in the East or the West.

Kosuke Koyama wrote a book about God's time frame, and the book was entitled the "*Three-Mile-An-Hour God*." This is what he said. He said: "God walks 'slowly' because he is love. If he is not love he would have gone much faster. Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It goes on in the depth of our life, whether we notice or not, whether we are currently hit by storm or not, at three miles an hour. It is the speed we walk and therefore it is the speed the love of God walks."

Koyama suggests that God works at the speed with which we walk. I suggest oftentimes God works much, much slower than that. In fact one of our big problems in the West is that we are incredibly impatient when it comes to interacting with God. We actually

believe that our understanding of time can just be superimposed on the biblical narrative and that God will somehow see that he, too, really needs a watch that can break down time into hundredths of seconds, and he doesn't and, again, he won't. It is we who need to understand what the biblical pattern of time is because that's the pattern that God uses. See, the biblical pattern of time is not organized around blocks of time. That's uniquely Western in its approach. I mean, we get one-hour lunch breaks or eight-hour workdays, one-week vacations, we block out times for tasks. Well, the biblical pattern is exactly the opposite. In the Bible it's the task itself that determines the time, not the time that determines the task. I mean consider *Ecclesiastes 3*, it says: *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven; a time to be born, a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to tear, a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.* You know, we budget a week or so for a birth and three days or so for a death and everything in between according to

efficiency instead of efficacy. Western industrial societies are literally slaves to an artificial rhythm of time and that's not the way that God designed us. This is much more the product of the industrial revolution with its desire to squeeze more productivity out of each and every second. And we are obsessed with this. And it's a form of enslavement that we just don't realize. I mean, have you ever noticed how little time our time saving devices have given us? Think about it. We have machines now that wash our clothes, wash our dishes, that mow our lawns, that transport us 65 miles in one hour, but somehow or other we don't have nearly the time that folks who never had those machines seemed to have. And the reason why is that we have become slaves to this Western idea of productivity. You see, in the end our time saving machines never really save time, what they do is they just increase the amount that we are supposed to produce within that time. That's a form of slavery. The biblical patterns of time are not based on maximizing productivity, rather they're based on how God designed us. The biblical pattern of work is not even remotely a forty-hour work week, rather it's a matter of slowness and suddenness, it's springtime and harvest, it's planting and resting and harvesting followed by more resting. I mean, the agrarian work pattern is to work intensely and then to rest completely. That's how Jesus worked. We just don't have the patience for that. And our problem with patience is that we just don't have the time for God's timing

in our life. And God's seasons very seldom match ours, and when they don't, we feel abandoned. First thing that we have to realize here is that we are the ones who are actually trying to redefine the rules here. We want God to play by Western rules, and he won't. We want our lives to work and we want it now. We look at the time instead of the task and we define God's faithfulness by how quickly he tends to the task of fixing our lives. And when he's not fast enough, we wonder why he's so silent and uncaring about her plight and the fact is he is neither. You see, it is we who are out of sync with him and not vice versa.

Just consider some of the time frames that God shows us in scripture. They're illustrative of how God views time. You know, we consider somebody like Moses, he's driven out into the desert to learn how to become the leader of Israel. Well, you know, our Western approach to that would say, okay, he's got maybe four years of under grad then two years for an MBA and then maybe a few years of post grad work. Okay. Moses, that'll take you maybe six to eight years to get enough time for any leadership position you're going to need. God had no problem taking 40 years. Consider Noah's ark. It took Noah approximately 120 years to build the ark. Took God six days to create the entire world. And yet he patiently waited for Noah. *1 Peter says: God's patience, waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared.* Again, this is a

two-fold expression of the enormity of God's patience. Number one, he who created the universe in six days is patiently waiting while Noah meticulously puts together every little bit of the ark. God could have made that ark appear in a second. But he chose to wait for Noah. And meanwhile every day of that 120 years God's patience is being tested and tried as people grow more and more wicked every day until in the end God says that *the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*. Just try to imagine a Western mindset that would be willing to patiently endure that for 120 years.

I mean we look at God's temple. Solomon says I'm going to build you a temple. 42 years in construction. Think of Abraham, ninety-nine years old and he's given the astounding news that his ninety-year-old wife Sarah is now going to bear a son. And God announces in *Genesis 17:16*: *"I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."* What God doesn't even address in that is the fact that that's the same promise he made to Abraham 25 years earlier. If you go back to *Genesis 12*, it says: *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless*

those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. The fact that it took twenty-five years for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham was almost immaterial to God. It was a very big deal to Abraham but not to God because God's certainty never wavered over time. I mean, it was Abraham's lack of certainty that caused him to doubt and impregnate Sarah's servant Hagar. And you have some sympathy for Abraham, he waited ten years for God's promise to come true, because Sarah never conceived because it wasn't God's timing as yet. And even after Hagar had born Abraham a son, God waited fifteen more years to fulfill his promise to give Sarah the son that he had promised. You see, the wheels of God's way keep grinding forward on God's timetable no matter what Abraham did. Trust me, the same thing applies to us. You see, if you are his child, he has a plan for you, but it's a plan that requires patience. God is infinitely more patient than we could ever hope to be and our frustration, our disappointment, even our anger is not going to alter his plan. As my dad used to say, you can do this the easy way or you can do it the hard way but you're going to do it. And the difference between the easy way and the hard way often comes down to the simple idea of patience.

So this morning we want to look at patience three ways. We want to look at patience defined, patience developed, and finally, patience displayed. First let me just define "patience." Just ask, is it the same as self-control? We looked at self-control already. I mean, is it another type of ability to keep from exploding, an ability to kind of grit my teeth and keep a lid on it when things go badly? Well, actually it's none of the above. Patience is part of a circle that begins and ends with the sovereignty of God. It's the ability to accept every single event in my life as flowing from the hand of God. Remember what it means to abide. To abide means to remain, it means to stay put. Patience or endurance is the ability to stay put under difficult circumstances. It literally means to abide under trials. The reason why patience is absolutely critical to faith is that it's always the first step to seeing God's hand in your life. Listen to what Paul says in *Romans 5:3*. He says this, he says: *We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* So here's Paul, he's starting out with suffering but he ends up with hope and it's a hope born out of seeing God's love poured into our heart, but it all starts with patience. And you can liken the process to someone climbing a mountain and the climb is really the struggle that we all get

involved in, it's the suffering that comes into our lives; and you can either continue the climb through patience or you can give up. If you have patience, if you have endurance, if you have perseverance, you keep moving up the mountain no matter how hard it gets. And as you keep moving and sometimes it's not moving, it's crawling, but as you keep moving, you discover what God calls character. And the term is actually proven character. It's knowing by experience that through Christ something has happened and you have been changed. Proven character is the certain knowledge that I am not the same person I was when I started this climb. It's knowing that Christ has changed me, and that's what gives me the hope to continue to keep climbing. Suffering produces perseverance or patience, perseverance produces character, and character produces hope. If you climb up a mountain, no matter how hard it gets, you continue to climb and at any one point you can pause. You can look down at the mountain and you can see that you are not where you were when you started. You can see that Christ in some way, in somehow has moved you. And it really doesn't matter if you're miles higher or inches higher, you realize that you are now moving forward. That's what gives you the hope to keep climbing. That's how God works in our lives. If you don't have patience, you're never going to stay on the mountain long enough to see what God can do. I mean James says the very same thing in *James 1:2*, he says: *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet*

trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

See, the first part of the testing of our faith is whether or not we're willing to stay on the mountain. And if you stay, God can show you great and mighty things that you know not, but if you leave, you never reach the point of experiencing the hand of God in your life. You leave and patience never has a chance to finish its work in your life. So patience defined is trusting God's sovereignty enough to see his hand at work in your life.

Second is the development of patience. All right. So how do we do that? How do I develop patience? Like I said, patience, it's a fruit of the spirit and you don't get the fruit of the spirit by going after it directly. You don't get patience by trying or studying or training to be patient. You can't go to a patient seminar to receive the fruit of the spirit known as patience. I mean, to be sure, you can learn some techniques of human interaction and human resources but that is not the fruit of the spirit. You see, the real fruit of the spirit traces itself right back to the source, and the source is the vine. Jesus said, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."* I mean non-believers can express self-control and

patience but it's not the same thing because the source is different. It's like the difference between a grape drink and grapes. You know, a grape drink might taste good, it might even claim it's full of vitamins, it might claim that it's good for you, but the source is not a grapevine, it's a food company. Grapes, on the other hand, can only come from one source and that is a grapevine. You see, if you trace patience backward as a genuine fruit of the Holy Spirit, you must wind up at the Spirit of Christ. If you trace any other form of patience backwards, you're going to wind up arriving at personality or character or training, and these are all good things, they're just not something that comes directly from God. When Jesus said, abide in me, you will bear much fruit, he was identifying himself as the source of all genuine fruitfulness. What I don't think we get is the abiding part, what God means by that. I've said it many times, we can crudely translate Christ's words as saying, look, if you hang around me long enough, I'm going to begin to rub off on you. It won't be a conscious thing but Christ's essence, which is the fruit of the spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, meekness, gentleness, and self-control, the essence of who he is will begin to rub off on you. And we saw that last week when we spoke about the disciples after they're arrested. They were a source of amazement to the people who had arrested them. They noted, they knew who these guys were, they remembered they were

crude, uneducated fishermen and now they appeared altogether different. And *Acts 4* says: *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.* They were the ones who had hung around with Jesus and Jesus clearly had rubbed off on them. See, the problem is Jesus only begins to rub off on you when you really seriously begin to hang around him, and that takes patience. Jesus is saying in effect that when you hang around me, among the things that will begin to happen automatically is you will find patience growing within you. And the reason why is because Jesus Christ is the source of all patience, and his patience is going to rub off on you, and this is how it happens. James says in *James 4:8*: *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.* When you begin to draw near to God, he will begin reformatting the way you think. Paul says in *Romans 12*: *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* You see, it's kind of surprising to learn that the key to developing patience has really nothing to do with trying to be patient. It has everything to do with renewing your mind by the way you see yourself in relation to God. And the key to patience is similar to the key to real estate. You know, it's not location, location, location, instead it's perspective, perspective,

perspective. It is a transformed mind with a transformed perspective that enables the fruit of patience to grow.

And that leads me to point three, which is patience displayed. I want to give you an example of that from my own experience. I want to recount to you an incident that took place many, many years ago that had to do with my septic system. This is not the septic tank miracle, that's another story, I talked about that one before. I got a long history with septic tanks, I don't know why, but this is about a time many, many years ago when my septic pump went bad. Let me just set the stage for you. It's a Monday evening. Janice, my wife, has been on the phone all day dealing with one of our kids who just had their student aid canceled, and this is when I was still working full time as a cabinetmaker and business was not going well, it was highly stressful, I was in the middle of a job that wasn't going well, I'd lost key employee, and I was still working part time here at the church. And so I get a call from someone at the church reminding me that I am missing a key meeting. So I try to jump in the car to run to the meeting. I go running out to my car and realize that my car is dead. So I'm outside and I'm trying to figure out how to get a ride and one of my boys comes up to me and says, "Hey, Dad, the house stinks." Okay. So I go home and it reeks, I go in the house, it reeks of sewage. I'm thinking, well, it must be a clogged vent pipe on the roof. So I

go up on the roof and as I'm up on the roof, another one of my sons comes and says, "Hey, Dad, the basement's full of water." I knew instantly I did not have a clogged vent pipe and I knew exactly what it was. You see we have a pumped sewage system. That means that in a hole in the ground some ten feet underground under eight feet of sewage effluent was now a defective pump that had to be replaced, and the only way you could do that is by putting a new pump down there, but first it requires pumping the whole thing out and climbing down into it to get to the broken pump.

Now, have you ever been inside a working septic tank? Mind you, this happened at dinner time. This was some -- my memory's a little hazy, this was some 20, 25 years ago. But as I recall, the kids are running through the neighborhood, they're gleefully telling all of our neighbors about our crisis. So I had a good friend of mine, Mike, and I called him and asked him to help me out in searching out this buried pump and eventually we find a different pump, we pump out the tank, we get down in the septic tank to replace the broken pump and by now we both reek of sewage and Mike said, "You know something? I think this is exactly how we smell to God." I said, "Could be." But at this point everything reeks of sewage.

I want you to picture the scene as I remember it. So Mike and I

walk into the house and there's Janice and she's still at the kitchen table, she's still pouring over these student aid forms from our original crisis, there's a half dozen kids from our house in the neighborhood and they're all milling around, they're just sucking up the chaos because they love that. The basement is still flooded with sewage and the house still stinks. And so Mike says to Janice, "And you thought you'd get to spend a typical Monday evening at home, didn't you?" And Janice looks at Mike, without batting an eye and says, "Mike, this is a typical Monday evening at home." And we all burst out laughing. I mean can I tell you that the stress of those things could have easily resulted in us being at each other's throats? The difference is all a matter of perspective, perspective, perspective. And it all comes down to three very basic questions: Number one, what was happening; number two, why was it happening; and number three, how does God want me to respond?

Well, the first perspective was about what was happening. I mean, what were the facts and what's the context? It's very easy to get caught up in a broken septic system because it literally stinks. I mean, it's a hassle, it's a headache, but in reality, it's not cosmic at all. I mean my problem was a broken pump, it was an inconvenience but it was certainly not life-threatening. So sometimes you just have to take three steps backwards in order to

get perspective. And the fact was my problem stemmed from the fact that I owned a highly engineered sewage system that wasn't working and I realize, for much of the world, I mean, they don't know flush toilets from rocket ships. So what do I have to complain about? It was an irritant but that was all that it was. Sooner or later I knew it would be fixed.

Then I would have to answer the second question: Why did this happen? And here's why abiding in Christ becomes critical. Here's where patience comes from. The question is: Do I believe that God controls all things including sewage pumps? That's really the question. You see, we often say we trust God and I genuinely think we mean it but we mean it on a wholesale level. And we can say with the psalmist in *Psalm 31: I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hand.* Well, it's easy to understand that on a wholesale level but what about retail? See, on a wholesale level it's God, my times are in your hands, my years, my seasons, my life, it's all in your hands, God. That's easy to say on a wholesale level. But on a retail level it's much more it's my day, my hours, my minutes, it's my moment by moment. You know our whole life is just a series of moments strung together. So is God the Lord of the moment even when the moment is a broken sewage pump? Well, the only way you can say yes is if you really believe it and the only way you can really believe it is if

you've really experienced the hand of God in your life, and the only way you can experience the hand of God in your life is by trusting him enough to be patient. Patience is the realization that the hand of God is behind every event in my life and that my times are indeed in his hands. I mean if God really controls my life, then he controls the years, the days, the hours, the minutes, and the seconds of it, even the hundredths of seconds. And when I insist on controlling my times, my patience just disappears.

So the third question we ask ourselves when our septic pump goes is: How does God want me to respond to this? Well, again, let me point out this was an irritant, it wasn't a tragedy. I mean what if it was a tragedy? Would it be any different? I don't think so. I mean it's easy for me to say right now and I don't want to sound presumptuous, but if stuff really does happen beyond the hand of God, if I am on my own making my own way with my own resources, if my times really are only in my hands, then I'm going to kick and I'm going to rail at every trial, be it an irritant or a tragedy. If I sense that God's sovereign hand is in every single thing in my life, and that includes every single moment of my life, it will revolutionize my walk with him because that's what true patience is. We define it as the ability to abide under trials. We develop patience by hanging around Jesus enough so that that part of his essence, that part that demonstrated his absolute trust in his

Father rubs off on us. We display the patience not necessarily in spectacular acts but in every day living, and that includes broken septic pumps. See, our perception is tied directly to our understanding of who God is and what he did for us. He says: *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* Understand, Jesus became one of us, he lived this life on earth here perfectly, and then he offered that life as payment in full for our sin, and by faith in him we get to claim his righteousness as our own and stand before a holy God perfected in Christ. And what God is telling us, he says, I've already given you the most I can give you, literally my own blood, my blood shed for you. He argues from the greater to the lesser, saying, I gave you my Son. What more do you need for proof of my love for you? If I gave you my own Son, don't you think I care enough about all the things that happen in your life, including your septic system? Can you trust me enough to believe that all things, including septic fiascoes, work together for good to those who love God and who are called according to his purpose? And what God is really saying to us in the West is to be challenged, he is challenging us to be patient enough to let the love of Christ work itself out in your life.

So the question that I want to leave with you this morning is: Do you have patience, and do you want it? And are you willing to

abide in Jesus till his patience rubs off on you? It's the fruit of the Spirit, and it's one of the reasons that we were put here on earth for, and remember, Jesus said this is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit. And patience is one of those fruits. So make every effort to add to your faith patience. Let's pray.

Father, I do thank you for your word, I thank you for your exhortation through Peter. And, Lord, we do pray that you would give us the ability to add to our faith patience. And, Lord, that is a matter of having a heavenly perspective, it's a matter of seeing your hand in every single thing that takes place in our lives and understanding that you will give us the grace to get through every single thing in your life because you are growing the fruit of the Spirit patience in every one of us. It is something that you had in perfection, it is something that you want us to have as well. I pray you would continue to grow us and I pray you would give us the ability to bring honor and glory to you through patience, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.